

THE TEENAGE DIALECT

Sarah Ann Telley

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Kim Brian Lovejoy, Ph.D., Chair

Scott R. Weeden, Ph.D.

Master's Thesis
Committee

Susanmarie Harrington, Ph.D.

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Abstract

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The Teenage Dialect

This study investigated teenage language and its functions. More specifically, after conducting a data analysis which revealed the most common features of “teen speak,” the features were dissected for their usage patterns and significance within the realm of adolescent life and development. The research was based on linguist Marcel Danesi’s model of teenage language, which provided a comparative basis for analysis and categorization.

The language data were collected from videos posted to a popular publicly-accessed website. The videos studied contained teenagers engaged in casual conversations. The subjects in the videos covered a broad spectrum in regard to gender, age, and race; all of them were from the United States. A total of 17 videos were collected and analyzed for their language qualities; from that 17, nine videos were chosen at random and analyzed and charted further for statistical purposes.

Emotional language, group language, and self-centered language were found to be the most common features of the teenage vocabulary. While each feature encompasses unique characteristics and could stand as its own hallmark of teen language, the three features together were found to be crucial supporters of teenage development. It became evident that the language provided the teens with a sense of self and strengthened peer relationships. This finding is significant because it supports the notion that teenage

language is patterned and meaningful. It also negates the belief held by some that teenagers' words are sloppy and careless.

This thesis is relevant in many fields. While those in the field of language studies would find value in the research, individuals in the field of adolescent development would, as well. Education is another realm that could benefit from the research; the findings would inform teachers about the language used by their teenage students and help them form better, more understanding, relationships with them.

Kim Brian Lovejoy, Ph.D.

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